



# CAPTivations

## Success Stories in Prevention

October 2003



CAPTivations is a publication of CSAP's Southwest Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT) funded by cooperative agreement with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

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CSAP's Southwest CAPT is administered by the Southwest Prevention Center at the University of Oklahoma's College of Continuing Education. This document is printed at no cost to the taxpayers of the State of Oklahoma.

### People United for Families

With the challenge of having one of the highest rates of working mothers in the country, Nebraska City's People United for Families is responding with mentoring and after school programs aimed at bringing more adult contact to Otoe County's children.

"A lot of our parents are working two jobs, and the incomes are low even with both parents working," explains Jackie Schmitz, program director for People United for Families, and project director for the Drug Free Communities Program. "They don't have a lot of time to spend with their kids. That's why after school and mentoring programs are helpful."

People United for Families is in its second year as a Drug Free Communities Program, under a grant from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Since it began, it has moved from a Nebraska City program to cover the entire Otoe County, with more than 40 people on the coalition. Both the city and county government are involved, Schmitz said.

Otoe County, in southeast Nebraska, has a population of about 10,000, and is highly Caucasian, though it does have a growing Hispanic population. Nebraska City is 50 miles from both Omaha and Lincoln, Neb., and is not far from Kansas City. It is just off Interstate 29 and close to Interstate 80, making it a transportation stop for drugs.

In order to find out what the county's main substance abuse issues were, People United for Families sent a community survey out in December 2002 to 3000 homes. The survey showed general support for a prevention effort, but it also showed that one-third of the adults who responded thought it was okay to supply alcohol to minors, at least on special occasions.

Because of the survey, the coalition is in the process of putting together a Safe Homes program, in which parents can sign up to be on a list of homes where alcohol and other drugs will not be served.

One of the main programs of People United for Families is an after school program for middle school youth held at the local

Ambassador Wellness Center. The local school district provides the transportation from both public and parochial schools from around the county for students to attend the program.

The program is a public-private partnership, Schmitz said, with the wellness center providing programming staff, such as instructors for tae kwon do lessons, and the coalition providing the activities staff.

During the first hour, the students who attend focus on mental activities, such as computer-based activities. The center provides the computers. The second hour is more physically oriented, with students taking tae kwon do lessons or swimming in the center's pool.

The biggest challenge so far has been to get the community to realize this program is for everyone in middle school, Schmitz said.

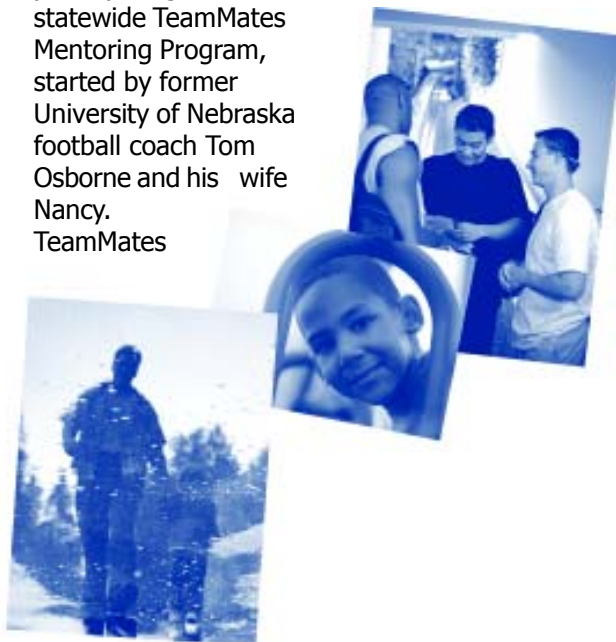
"We think the community thinks it's only for poor kids or for those who are at high risk," she said. "But it's for all kids."

The numbers fluctuate, but the coalition has had as many as 20 attend on a given day. That may not seem like much, but the kids who do attend like it, Schmitz said, and the program is just now in its second year.

People United for Families is also participating in the statewide TeamMates Mentoring Program, started by former University of Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne and his wife Nancy.

TeamMates

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pairs adult volunteers with students, usually in middle school, who meet together for an hour a week during school. Students who stay in the program, stay in school, stay out of legal trouble, and who do not become parents receive scholarships for post-secondary education.

With People United for Families, TeamMates started with four schools in Nebraska City, with 42 students in grades five through 12 being

matched with adult mentors. With the 2003-04 school year the program will expand to all the school districts in Otoe County.

Students are referred to the program by parents or the court system. Adults are volunteers from the community who are trained on how to relate to the students and are matched with them. The goal is to have 100 youth in grades four through 12 matched with mentors by 2005. "Our biggest challenge is to find more male mentors," she notes.

People United for Families also has a family mentoring program, matching families that are at risk with families that serve as mentors. This gives younger kids the chance to have mentors, as well as their older siblings. The program has six matches so far, and the goal is to have 12.

A program for the younger students is Study Buddies. Elementary school kids in grades one through five are paired with adult volunteers who work one day a week with students who are struggling with academic performance. The idea is for the kids to have

fun while they are studying and to build a relationship with an older person, in a way that becomes a prevention tool as they get older. Study Buddies predates the OJJDP

grant, and has been around for about 10 years said.

The grant does fund a Youth Leadership Council, a group which plans alternative activities for fellow high school students, with the help of adult volunteers. The challenge, Schmitz states, is to keep high school students interested. In the past, fifty percent of middle school students were involved in drug-free groups, but many of them drop out in high school.

**"Not only does the Youth Leadership Council give the students a chance to plan drug-free activities, it also helps the students develop leadership skills..."**

"We've gotten the Rotaries, Jaycees, and other groups to help sponsor and advertise, and we have (drug-free) functions more often," she explains. "Before the grant, we only had two a year: after prom and after the first football game.

"Now, we have them 12 times a year, especially in the summer. We have pool parties, bands, movies, and cosmic bowling. We try to give them ideas of things they can then do on their own."

Not only does the Youth Leadership Council give the students a chance to plan drug-free activities, it also helps the students develop leadership skills that they can use once they graduate high school and go on to college and their adult lives.

People United for Families is still in the process of working out its evaluation piece, working with Gallup polling company on numbers for the TeamMates program. However, according to surveys done by TeamMates statewide, that program is showing some success. Mentees statewide maintained a "C" average, with no upward or downward trend, according to evaluations done in 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years. However, those most at risk for poor grades made the most progress, with their grades rising one-third of a point.

Average referrals for discipline decreased from eight per semester to five. Those most at risk made the most progress, dropping from 12 per semester to 6.5. Mentees most at risk for unexcused absences had fewer of them, from 9 per semester to 6.

Over 69 percent rated themselves as "good to very good" in being able to avoid delinquency, and over 82 percent rated themselves as "good to very good" in being able to avoid substance abuse and early parenting.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

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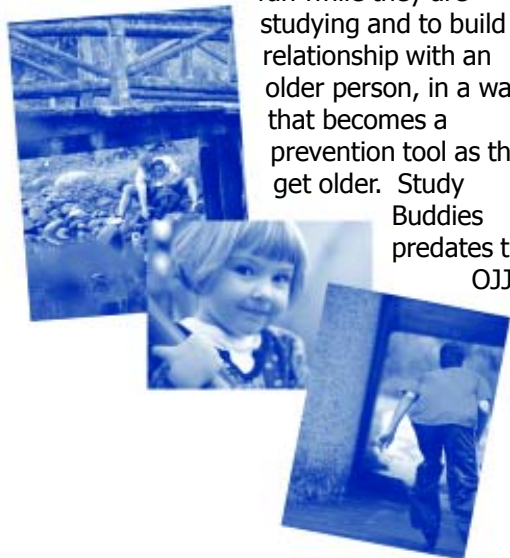
#### **Resources:**

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention  
[www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html)

Join Together  
[www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America  
[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

CSAP's Model Programs  
<http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov>



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